

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

DERRICK L. SMITH,

Plaintiff,

OPINION AND ORDER

v.

13-cv-658-wmc

JUDGE VINCENT HOWARD, *et al.*,

Defendants.

Plaintiff Derrick L. Smith has filed this civil action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, stemming from a criminal proceeding against him in Marathon County, Wisconsin. He has been granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* for purposes of the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). Because he is incarcerated, the PLRA also requires the court to screen the complaint and dismiss any portion that is legally frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted or asks for money damages from a defendant who by law cannot be sued for money damages. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. In addressing any *pro se* litigant's complaint, the court must read the allegations generously, reviewing them under "less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers." *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 521 (1972). Even under this very lenient standard, Smith's request for leave to proceed must be denied and this case will be dismissed for reasons set forth below.

FACTS

For purposes of this order, the court accepts all well-pled allegations as true and assumes the following probative facts.¹

The plaintiff, Derrick L. Smith, has a lengthy criminal record of convictions from Marathon County, Wisconsin, dating back to at least 1996. Smith turned himself in to the Marathon County Jail on June 5, 2012, after he was charged with several felony offenses in Marathon County Case No. 2012CF386.² Smith was also charged with violating the terms of his supervised release from a previous sentence of imprisonment. Following the revocation of his parole and return to state prison in October 2012, Smith was transferred from the Marathon County Jail to the Dodge Correctional Institution (“DCI”) of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (“WDOC”). In February 2013, Smith was assigned to the Columbia Correctional Institution (“CCI”). On August 6, 2013, Smith was released from state prison on extended supervision. Because a detainer was pending against him from Marathon County, Smith returned to custody at the Marathon County Jail, where he is currently awaiting trial in Case No. 2012CF386.

In this case, Smith has filed suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against two state officials (Marathon County Circuit Court Judge Vincent Howard and Assistant District Attorney

¹ The court has supplemented the sparse allegations in the complaint with dates and procedural information about plaintiff’s underlying criminal case from the electronic docket available at Wisconsin Circuit Court Access, <http://wcca.wicourts.gov> (last visited November 15, 2013). The court draws all other facts from the complaint in this case and several others filed recently by Smith, as well as any exhibits attached to his pleadings. *See* FED. R. CIV. P. 10(c); *see also* *Witzke v. Femal*, 376 F.3d 744, 749 (7th Cir. 2004) (explaining that documents attached to the complaint become part of the pleading, meaning that a court may consider those documents to determine whether plaintiff has stated a valid claim).

² Smith has been charged in that case with first-degree sexual assault with a dangerous weapon; substantial battery intending bodily harm; strangulation and suffocation (two counts); false imprisonment; and victim intimidation by use or attempted use of force. *See State v. Derrick L. Smith*, Marathon County Case No. 2012CF386.

Theresa Wetzsteon) for their role in prosecuting the criminal charges pending against him in Marathon County Case No. 2012CF386. For example, Smith contends that Wetzsteon introduced hearsay testimony at a preliminary hearing on August 1, 2012, and that Judge Vincent Howard abused his discretion by admitting the evidence. Smith contends further that Wetzsteon used false information to obtain an “excessive bond” and to “fool the judge into rendering an unjust decision.” He accuses them of judicial and prosecutorial misconduct.

OPINION

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim where the plaintiff alleges too little, failing to meet the minimal federal pleading requirements found in Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Rule 8(a) requires a “short and plain statement of the claim” sufficient to notify the defendants of the allegations against them and enable them to file an answer.” *Marshall v. Knight*, 445 F.3d 965, 968 (7th Cir. 2006). While it is not necessary for a plaintiff to plead specific facts, he must articulate “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). “Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements” are insufficient to establish a plausible claim. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2007) (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555) (observing that courts “are not bound to accept as true a legal conclusion couched as a factual allegation”). On the other hand, a plaintiff may “plead himself out of court” by including allegations which show that he has no valid claim. *Lekas v. Briley*, 405 F.3d 602, 613-14 (7th Cir. 2005) (citations omitted).

To state a valid claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege that (1) he was deprived of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States; and (2) the deprivation was visited upon him by a person or persons acting under color of state law.

Buchanan-Moore v. County of Milwaukee, 570 F.3d 824, 827 (2009) (citing *Kramer v. Village of North Fond du Lac*, 384 F.3d 856, 861 (7th Cir. 2004)). To demonstrate liability under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege sufficient facts showing that an individual personally caused or participated in the alleged constitutional deprivation. See *Zimmerman v. Tribble*, 226 F.3d 568, 574 (7th Cir. 2000); *Walker v. Taylorville Correctional Ctr.*, 129 F.3d 410, 413 (7th Cir. 1997) (noting that “personal involvement” is required to support a claim under § 1983). Dismissal is proper “if the complaint fails to set forth ‘enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.’” *St. John’s United Church of Christ v. City of Chicago*, 502 F.3d 616, 625 (7th Cir. 2007) (quoting *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)).

Liberally construed, Smith challenges the validity of his detention pending trial in Case No. 2012CF386 based on the bond determination made in that case. To the extent that Smith takes issue with his continued confinement, his claim is barred by *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994). Smith admits that he never successfully challenged the amount of the bond set in his case. See, e.g., *Johnson v. Litscher*, 260 F.3d 826, 831 (7th Cir. 2001).

Even if *Heck* were inapplicable, he cannot state a claim against Judge Howard or ADA Wetzsteon. Judges are entitled to absolute immunity from claims arising out of acts performed in the exercise of their judicial functions. See *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 355 (1978). Prosecutors are entitled to absolute immunity from civil rights claims for actions taken in the scope of their duties in initiating and pursuing a criminal prosecution. See *Kalina v. Fletcher*, 522 U.S. 118, 123-24 (1997); *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 410 (1976). Since the acts challenged here fall squarely within the scope of defendants’ absolute immunity, Smith’s claims are frivolous on their face.

Because Smith cannot state a viable claim for relief under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 based on the facts outlined in the complaint, any proposed amendment will not cure the defects outlined above. Accordingly, the complaint will be dismissed with prejudice as legally frivolous and for failure to state a federal claim upon which relief may be granted.

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. Plaintiff Derrick L. Smith's request for leave to proceed is DENIED and his complaint is DISMISSED with prejudice as legally frivolous and for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
2. This dismissal will count as a STRIKE for purposes of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

Entered this 25th day of November, 2013.

BY THE COURT:

/s/

WILLIAM M. CONLEY
District Judge